

STUDIES OF ONA BAGNICKAITĖ'S COLLECTION OF JAPANESE PRINTS*

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Europe learned about *Ukiyo-e* prints in the London world exhibition of 1862, later from exhibitions in Paris (1867 and 1883) and St. Petersburg (1897) (6, p. 72, 21, p. 433–434). Western artists were aroused and inspired by the new and lively Oriental art, its expressive language and silence. Many generations of artists, representatives of various schools and tendencies admired Japanese woodblock printing. Many Western artists had collections of Japanese prints and studied them as well as took pride in them. The wave of interest in the Orient at the turn of the 19th–20th centuries also reached Lithuania.

The researchers of M. K. Čiurlionis's¹ (1, p. 16) work speak about his interest in and admiration for the art and philosophy of the Far East. His art contains links to *Ukiyo-e* masters' works.

Far less known and, in fact, forgotten is Čiurlionis's fellow student at Warsaw Art School – the artist Ona Bagnickaitė. There is little biographical data about this interesting artist and inspiring personality. We know only one article written by Vanda Sruogienė in Chicago in 1971. The professor knew Bagnickaitė very well, because Sruogienė's parents Kazimieras and Jadvyga Daugirdas lived in her neighbourhood. And since she had "[...] an eternally young soul, she befriended people of three generations: my mother, mine and my daughter [...]" (19).

Ona Bagnickaitė was born around 1877, however nothing is known about her family or childhood. When she was eight, the "happy, affectionate" girl Adžė or Ancikė appeared in Santekliai (or Sandininkai, Akmenė district) manor perhaps in 1885 and became the ward of its owner Teklė Gruževskaitė. Santekliai belonged to the Gruževskis family, famous in the past in Lithuania, and were left to their unmarried female members to live since immemorial times. At that time the seignior of that manor Kazimiera Radzevičiūtė lived there as well. The tutouresses loved and even spoiled the girl.

As it was usual in manors then, the girl was taught Polish and French at home, as well as the piano, drawing and communication. When she grew up, she was sent to a famous cookery

* I would like to express my gratitude to Agnė Narušytė for translating my article in English, to "Aušros" Museum and to Balys Sruoga's Memorial House – Museum for the permission to publish their woodblock print collections.

¹ The most prominent Lithuanian symbolist artist and composer since the beginning of the 20th century.

school in Poland. Later, in 1906–1907, Bagnickaitė joined professor K. Stabrovski's class at the Warsaw Art School. Her aunts gave her money also for further studies of painting in Paris, only professor Sruogienė does not remember whether at the school of Claude Monet or of Henri Matisse. After World War I she came back from Paris and “[...] hung in Santekliai several impressionistic paintings, oil on canvas by herself and other artists, but soon had to take them off, for her guests laughed at them. [...] I remember it as if happening now – those paintings were interesting: it is not worth trusting the educated people of Veikšniai of that time, because when in 1911 the “connoisseurs” saw the triptych, by M. K. Čiurlionis, *Raigardas* in the priest Jarulaitis's parsonage, they would declare unanimously that he is decadent and artistically worthless [...]” (19)

Bagnickaitė dropped painting and in 1915–1917 studied in Naugardukas, in the weaving school of her former teacher from Warsaw Stabrovski. In 1918 she came back to Santekliai and founded a weaving workshop. She became a famous weaver and with her works repeatedly participated in agricultural exhibitions in Šiauliai and Kaunas in 1928–1930. Not only the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania had her huge carpets, heavy curtains decorated with massive tulips-lilies from her workshop in his house, but many Lithuanian embassies abroad also did.

In her manor house, which Ona Bagnickaitė inherited from her tutouresses just before the war, there was the wonderful memory from Paris – the collection of prints (19) incomparable to anything in Lithuania. It includes works by almost all famous artists of Edo period: Hiroshige, Kunisada, Kiyonaga, Katsugava, Yeisen, Katsushika, Kikugava Eizan, Takahashi Hiroaki (Shote), of main genres: portraits, landscapes, compositions with human figures, images of plants and birds. Beside that, it is of one taste, one “smell”, it is very stylish and integral.

Vanda Sruogienė was writing about the Paris period: “What Bagnickaitė did in Paris, in the bohemian environment, she never told me, her friend's daughter, only sometimes she would entrust me with the fact that she lived for five years in a Japanese colony, how she appreciated the very strange, but enormously subtle Japanese culture, finally, how she was going to get married to a Japanese artist, called Saito. That Saito belonged to the samurai caste and when his brother died, he was forced to go back to Japan and marry the deceased man's widow [...] Bagnickaitė returned to Lithuania and never heard anything about that Japanese man” (19).

In 1940, when the manors were nationalised, twenty-one prints from Santekliai were transferred to Šiauliai *Aušros* museum (17, p. 18). Ona Bagnickaitė gave, as a present, three prints by Suzuki Harunobu to Vanda and Balys Sruoga in the 1920s². Now they belong to Balys Sruoga's memorial house – museum.

In 1940 that wonderful woman, a famous and popular artist who brought the prints, was deported from her home and from our memory. She fell ill and died in a hospital in a small town Oguduj, Oirotsk autonomous region, Altai territory. When she was going to be deported, “instead of packing necessary things, she was putting her hat on in front of a mirror and talking in contrary to what a common sense would suggest at that moment, repeating that she is not some simple woman, only a landlord's daughter [...]”.

² Verbal evidence given by Angelė Galnaitytė.

In the context of the artist's life story, even the term *ukiyo-e* acquires a symbolical meaning as an image of the changing world. This meaning is evident both in the Buddhist detachment sense "[...] sutch pleasures bring pain, because we are unable to disentangle ourselves emotionally from this our transitory, or literally, floating world, of human existence." (12, p. 11) and in the sense changed by the town-dwellers of Edo period and most beautifully expressed in the story *Ukiyo* by Asai Ryōi: "You are given only a moment of life to admire the beauty of the Moon, snow, blossoming cherry trees and autumn maple leaves, sing songs, taste wine, enjoy, despite misery impudently staring into your eyes, reject sorrow, live like a log carried by the flow of the river – this is *ukiyo*". Such thoughts form while reading the description of Ona Bagnickaitė's young days, written by Sruogienė: "[...] Her relative Gruževskaitė lived there (in Santekliai) for a while, she was considered as one of the richest brides in Lithuania at that time. Both of them caused indignation of many conservative landlords because they were "modern" and "democratic": they used to go to their acquaintances' manors alone, without a driver, bare feet, with handkerchiefs on their heads, not shy to dance with peasants at feasts." (19)

During the war, Vladas Zdzichauskas, a teacher, museum professional and bibliophile, was in charge of the collection of Šiauliai museum. Like other items from manors, these prints lost all their documentation. Their authors, inscriptions, signatures and seals had to be rediscovered. In the 1960s the art historians professor Vytenis Rimkus and doctor Jonas Sidaravičius, achieved that the texts should be translated by a famous specialist of prints, professor Basil William Robinson – research fellow at London's Victoria and Albert Museum (17, p. 19). Thus, the authors, dates of their works and the meaning of the compositions were specified. However, for instance, the author of *Izote* remained unclear. It is also doubtful, whether the author of *Crossbill on the Thistle Bush* was Katsushika Hokusai (17, p. 21). Unfortunately, Mr. Robinson's letter did not reach the Lithuanian researchers and museum professionals in the times of soviet censorship, only its' Russian translation. Thus the restorer of Šiaulių Aušros museum Elvina Karosienė initiated corresponding with Japanese restorers Kato Hiroshi (National research Institute for Cultural Properties, Tokyo (NRICPT)), Kentaro Ohbayashi (Specified Nonprofit Corporation. Japan Conversation Project (NPO JCP)), and lecturer Shiroto Makiko (Lecturer of Gakusyuin Women's college, speciality: History of publication/bibliography). In the year 2002 they specified the author of two drawings. In their common opinion the author who earlier was thought to be painter *Izote* is Takahashi Hiroaki (Shotei).

In 2000, while preparing a concise retrospective exhibition of *ukiyo-e* prints preserved in Lithuania, both collections from Šiauliai and Kaunas museums were brought to the Restoration Centre at the Lithuanian Art Museum. They were prepared for exhibition there and later examined and restored.

As restorers, we are slightly different from art historians. When we pick up an artist's product into our hands and examine it, we think first of all, what it is made of and how, what is its physical condition and chemical composition of materials. We have to know precisely, specifically and exhaustively, what materials the original consists of, then it is easier to choose materials supplementing and restoring its structure.

After examining the prints we were sure that the prints from the Šiauliai museum were framed in Krakow, Robert Jahoda's framing workshop (*Zakład galanterijne introligatorske oraz oprawy obrazow w Krakowie*). All of them had been framed in the same style as well as by using identical materials and on the back of some of their cardboards there was the seal of this workshop.

We were horrified when after taking the prints out of frames we saw that they were surrounded from all sides by bad quality, already stained cardboard and paper. Cardboard, which was produced at the beginning of the 20th century, contained a large amount of timber. Thus in the course of time, it became very acidic. The acidity of the examined cardboard could be demonstrated by the value of its water extract pH-3.9.

Many of the sheets of the paper laid under the prints had got quite a bright negative image of the composition of the print – the photo-oxidization of paper appeared to be so active that only the darker areas of ink of the prints protected the respectable areas of the low quality paper laid under the prints: now they happened to be much lighter. Then what was protecting what? It follows that good quality Japanese paper was protecting the bad European product laid underneath. We suspected that in such the environment the original paper of those valuable prints could not remain in good condition. Acids and biological pests damage both western and oriental paper most of all.

Usually new paper from fibres of mulberry, or *kozo*, does not contain many acids, its pH value varies around 7, the acidity of paper of the prints we examined did not always reach pH 6 or even 5. (Chemist Rūta Butkevičiūtė, the pH-meter-milivoltmeter pH-673, microcell was used there.)

We took great care in finding out how the prints used to be made. The Japanese had used traditional paper which was scooped out by hand, the so-called *washi*, which, besides, had nothing to do with “rice paper”, mentioned by many European authors. This mistake entered Western literature perhaps because the first Oriental paper first brought to Europe from China in 1750 was rice paper (5, p. 33). It is used for painting with ink and water paint, but is not used for printing.

Most colour woodblock prints are printed on *washi*, made from *kozo* tree (*Broussonetia kajinoki* or mulberry-tree) white bark fibre. When *washi* is scooped and paper mass is prepared, *tororo-aoi* (Hibiscus) root extract is added. The pulpy material thickens water thus helping to form the sheet of paper from the long fibre. *Kozo* paper is light-weight, off-white in colour and semi-translucent when held up to the light (2, 3, 12). Production of such *washi* was brought to perfection in 704–714 by Kakimoto-no-Hitomaro, who is still considered to be a deity, the patron of paper producers (16, p. 7–8).

Some artists used *gampi* or *mitsumata* fibre paper. These plants belong to the *Thymeleaceae* family. The *gampi* (*Diplomorpha sikokiana*) fibre is shorter and browner, lustrous and soft. Usually paper made from it is thin and translucent like a membrane, but sometimes thick and like parchment. *Mitsumata* (*Edgevorthia papyrifera*) paper is less translucent, because its fibre is shorter. It is browner than *kozo* (2, 4, 12).

I would like to point out that in Europe, paper was most often produced from flax, cotton wool and hemp fibres (9).

Before printing, the paper used to be sized with animal glue or protein glue obtained from seaweed (gelatine with alum) (2, 12), which prevented the fibres of the compressed paper from adhering to the block coated with paint and from pilling when the print was removed from it.

Pigments and dyes were mixed with wheat or rice starch paste to make thicker ink, which would adhere better to the paper, and obtain richer colours (22, 13).

Many old types of ink faded or changed chemically. Japanese researchers avoid taking samples from fragile originals, and the *ukiyo-e* period written records give little information about colouring materials used and Edo-period written records about pigments are scarce (12, p. 37), thus one can mostly rely on data obtained in Western laboratories.

The following dyes and pigments were used: black – plant charcoal and lamp soot; blue – indigo, red – rose, vermilion (mercuric sulphide) cinnabar; yellow – from plant roots (sp. *Gracinia*), plant barks, mustard green and arsenic sulphide; orange – lead sulphide. Instead of white, the white of paper was most of all used. Often an organic white pigment from powdered oyster shells *gofun* is found (7, p. 501–515; 12, p. 37). Some authors mention also inorganic white lead carbonate. Other colours used to be obtained by mixing pigments. Green malachite and other minerals were too rough for subtle woodblock prints (12, p. 37).

Following the Japanese researchers' attitude towards their subtle works of art, we avoided sampling the paper or inks unless it was absolutely necessary. We examined the paper fibre only under the Stereoscopic Microscope SMZ -1 (magnification X24) and identified that the paper used for the woodblock prints was made from fibers of the paper mulberry, or kozo, and the paper, used for underlining of some more damaged prints (Kikugava Eizan, "*Standing Geisha*", D-T3155, "*Portrait of Oiran*", DT-3168, Kunisada "*Portrait of Sugata*" D-T3157, Yeisen, "*Oiran, Reading a Book*", D-T3156) was made from fibers of gampi. We did not perform any chemical reactions. However, such examination is enough to choose paper with an analogous fibre structure for restoration.

We did not refuse to examine the material used for sizing paper of six prints. During the restoration the prints were washed in water and a thin protective polypropylene film was laid underneath. The chemist Janina Lukšėnienė noticed that this film could absorb the adhesive materials exuding from prints in water. She realised that without sacrificing anything and using this opportunity we could extract these materials and record their molecular spectra. She was working together with Marija Jakubėnienė. For this analysis the spectrophotometer "SPECORD 75 IR" was used. The spectra showed that the paper of one print (Hokusai, "*Crossbill on the Thistle Bush*", DT-3166) was sized with wheat starch paste, that of three prints (Kiyonaga, "*Women in an Interior*", DT-3162, Yeisen, "*Standing Geisha*", DT-3155 and Kunisada, "*Portrait of Shiratama*," DT-3152) was sized with protein glue mixed with sugars and the paper of two prints (Yeisen, "*Woman Holding a Kimono*", DT-3158 and Kunisada, "*Portrait of Sugata*", DT-3157) was sized with glue made of wheat flour and protein additives.

The Austrian restorer and paper technologist Karl Trobas wrote: "In any instruction for headache powder the buyer is informed about their indications and contraindications. Likewise all materials used in restoration, recipes and methods next to their prospective effect also have undesirable side effects. The restorer should not only know them, but also take them into account." (20, p. 18)

In the case of Japanese *kozo* paper such side effect occurs when the sheet is washed in water, because, for instance, some adhesive material of Hibiscus used for the production of paper (18, p. 225) or the adhesive used for consolidation of the paper is washed out.

The restorer can never repeat the production process. In the course of time and, unfortunately, during restoration lost materials have to be supplemented or replaced by close, similar and sometimes even better ones.

It is very important that the restorer chooses what is best for the object in order to preserve its material and artistic identity. We have to do what is necessary and not to do too much (14, p. 38–39; 8, p. 47–49). The poem *Deep in Thought on Another Life* by Okuma Kitomiti seems to address us, the restorers:

I don't need ranks,
Nor do I need titles of honour.
Here, in this land,
To be born again I would like
As the one I have been thus far.

Long reflections and discussions helped to establish the conception of restoration; the order of works was set.

It was decided to wash all the prints in filtered water. The restorers chose the washing method considering how much the structure of each sheet of paper was damaged. Most prints were washed in a bath filled with water filtered by shungite and cyanite filter Rosa and a porous polypropylene film placed on the surface of water.

In order to achieve better results, and shorten the time of the process, some prints were moistened in an ultrasonic humidifier (Laskaux HC-5: RH-100%, t-23°C) for two hours before plunging them into water. Another group of objects was washed in warm water. Only the time of washing differed: it varied from 20 to 60 minutes.

After washing paper is normally soaked in alkaline buffer solutions or sprayed by them. Lately as an alkaline medium for paper we use natural buffer solution – non-carbonised mineral water containing excess of Ca^{2+} , Mg^{2+} and with minimal Na^+ , Fe^{3+} ions and sulphate and nitrate anions. The best are various sorts of water from the streams from the Alps such as Thonon, Evian, Aix (France) etc. The paper of the prints from our collection was alkalinised by spraying each sheet with mineral water Evian (3–5 times).

Most paper technologists suggest structurally supplementing and consolidating European and Oriental paper with derivatives from cellulose, referring to theory and three decades of constant observations (20, p. 107–114; 2). However, Japanese artists and restorers traditionally do not avoid using protein of animal origin – gelatine. Thus, we consolidated prints that were sized with gelatine by spreading a solution of this material on them. Another group of prints whose paper was more starched was sized with the hydroxypropylcellulose solutions Klucel G and Klucel EF.

All torn and torn-off sections of paper were consolidated and changed with new Japanese paper of adequate thickness and colour, containing *kozo* fibre, designed for restoration. We used wheat starch glue made following a Japanese recipe (10, p. 49).

Six prints were unavoidably retouched with watercolour, fortunately, very little (Ando Hiroshige, "Surroundings of Shiru", D-T 3151; Ando Hiroshige, "The Shore of the Rocky Bay", D-T 3159; Utagawa Kunisada, "Portrait of Sugata", D-T 3157; Katsukawa Shunsen, "Woman with an Umbrella", D-T 3167; Keisai Yeisen, "Woman Holding a Kimono", D-T 3158; Kikugawa Eizan, "Portrait of Oiran" D-T 3168.).

All prints were put into new frames using only museum quality framing materials. The collection will be permanently exhibited in the renovated palace of the pre-war factory owner Chaim Frenkel in Šiauliai Aušros Museum.

The prints from the collection discussed in this article were restored by Dalia Jonynaitė, Raminta Kuprevičienė, Nijolė Muerlytė, Janita Petrauskienė, Eglė Piščikaitė, Rytė Šimaitė, Eglė Virpilaitienė and Audronė Želvienė.

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ONOS BAGNICKAITĖS JAPONIŠKŲJŲ GRAVIŪRŲ KOLEKCIJOS TYRINĖJIMAS

Dalia Jonynaitė

Santrauka

Straipsnyje kalbama apie vienos įdomiausių ir vientisiausių Lietuvoje Ukijo-e graviūrų kolekcijos tyrinėjimus. Šiuo metu ji saugoma „Aušros“ muziejuje Šiauliuose ir memorialiniame Balio Sruogos name-muziejuje Kaune. Prieš karą buvusios garsios dailininkės audėjos Onos Bagnickaitės japoniškų medžio raižinių rinkinys 1940 metais kartu su kitu dvarų inventoriumi pateko į LTSR muziejus praradęs visą įmanomą metriką. Minimi ir septintajame dešimtmetyje atlikti ikonografiniai rinkinio tyrimai, bet daugiau dėmesio skiriama kolekciją surinkusios menininkės asmenybei ir technologinėms kūrinių studijoms, kurias pastaraisiais metais atliko Lietuvos dailės muziejaus ir Prano Gudyno restauravimo centro mokslininkai tyrėjai bei restauratoriai. Remdamiesi Margaret Miller Kanada, Timothy Barreto darbais tyrinėjome, ant kokio popieriaus spausdintos graviūros, kaip jis buvo paruoštas spausdinimui. Atsižvelgiant į šių studijų rezultatus buvo pagrįstos ir parinktos subtilių japonų meno kūrinių restauravimo technologijos.

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